

## Dissent or Subversion?

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The peace movement executed its preplanned opposition to Operation Iraqi Freedom, a conflict waged by our country with congressional and popular approval.

The antiwar demonstrations were intended to be the opening shots in a campaign to paralyze the government and private sectors and force a halt to the war. Instead of displaying yellow ribbons and sending letters to comfort and encourage young Americans in harm's way, the antiwar folks would have the American people rise up, snarl traffic, and show the world that they don't support their country's policy.

Five minutes on the Internet will show you what I mean. Type in "Iraq anti war" to access site after site counseling citizens how to organize, disrupt whole cities, close down government offices and undermine the war effort.

As a soldier and a veteran of three wars, I've got a problem with all of this. I have graphic memories of the how hurtful it was to me and my comrades during the Vietnam War when we learned that crowds of Americans at home were struggling to undermine the goals for which we were laying it on the line in a combat zone. Conversely, I vividly recall how uplifting it was for all of us during Gulf War I when we received poignant "to any serviceperson" letters, when we learned of the yellow ribbon campaign, or when we heard Whitney Houston sing the "Star Spangled Banner."

Two features of today's antiwar movement ought to disturb all Americans.

First: The no-holds-barred approach of the hard-core militants, which shows early signs of the violence that so shattered Seattle during the 2000 World Trade Organization meetings. On the day after war broke out, 1,500 out-of-control demonstrators were arrested in San Francisco. In New York two days later, a hard core of demonstrators made their activist bones by forcing NYPD officers to arrest them. Violence appears to be many activists' aim.

Second: The movement's eager embrace of any champions who'll say what they want to hear, however spurious. I recently encountered a prime case of this. To illustrate, a brief war story is required.

In 1991, I led a special team to the Gulf to interrogate Saddam Hussein's captured senior officers. Among the topics: Saddam's chemical weapons. One general recalled ugly memories of blackened Kurdish corpses during Iraq's January 1988 Al Anfal campaign against the Kurds. Iraq, he acknowledged, had used chemical weapons during these operations.

He also recalled that Saddam had ordered the use of chemical weapons against the Kurdish village of Halabja in March 1988. The gassing of the Halabja Kurds was "general knowledge among Iraqi officers" he told us. Another officer told me, "Halabja was the incident that made the news, but there were many others."

After the war, I traveled to the U.S. Army War College to share the confessions of Saddam's generals with faculty members, including a former CIA analyst and self-styled expert on the Middle East. I particularly sought out this gentleman because he had told our skeptical team before we deployed that he felt Saddam got a bad rap on Halabja.

It could have been the Iranians behind the chemical attacks, the professor had insisted. Having just discussed the matter with Saddam's generals, I told him bluntly that their statements made his thesis untenable.

That was April 1991. Fast forward 12 years. Preparing this op-ed piece, I went to the Internet and poked in the professor's name. Sure enough, there he was, now retired from the War College, reinvented as an antiwar spokesperson, still hawking his absurd contention that the U.S. government fabricated the Iraqi crisis to gain control of Iraq's oil.

Worse, he's still repeating the spurious claim we disposed of more than a decade ago. In a January 31 "New York Times" op-ed piece, the professor repeated his shopworn thesis that Iranian gas might have killed the Kurds at Halabja, adding that: "Accusing [Saddam] of gassing his own people at Halabja as an act of genocide is not correct, because as far as the information we have goes, all of the cases where gas was used involved battles."

As the war neared, the professor achieved the zenith of his career when he was cited in enemy propaganda. On "Meet the Press" on Sunday [Editor: March 30, 2003], Tim Russert showed 1988 pictures of the corpses of Halabja villagers to Iraqi UN Ambassador Mohammed Al Douri — who insisted that blaming Saddam for the atrocity was American propaganda. To support his contention, Al Douri cited, you guessed it, our professor, the "CIA agent."

That persons of the professor's persuasion can speak their mind, however distorted their views, is a feature of our democracy all of us who have fought America's wars would support. But facts are facts: Saddam Hussein gassed the Kurds and the Iranians. He suppressed his own people, destabilized the region with one bloody conflict after another, and defied the international community's efforts to bring him to heel. For all of these reasons, and not for oil, Operation Iraqi Freedom was launched.

Where is the border between legitimate dissent and shameless subversion? Few would doubt that peaceful demonstrations, teach-ins, chanting slogans and waving signs are protected free speech.

But what about attempts to paralyze commerce, transportation and the government? Promulgating demonstrable untruths to improve a tyrant's image? Fueling the enemy's propaganda machine? Such tactics sow confusion at home, provide encouragement to the Iraqi regime, and prolong the war effort. The inevitable result: greater American casualties.

As a student of history, I wonder: What would the public reaction have been if, after hearing FDR's "day of infamy" speech back in December 1941, a prominent U.S. senator had condemned the president's failure to avert war and announced that he "wept for his country," or if mobs of

isolationist demonstrators had sought to paralyze the government's efforts to prosecute the war even as the defenders of Bataan fought against overwhelming Japanese forces?

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